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PAGE A 7

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NICARAGUA REBELS LINKED TO DEATHS

Hondurans Say the Guerrillas Apparently Tried to Disrupt Gun Flow to Salvador

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Special to The New York Times

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, Jan. 19 — Nicaraguan rebels are suspected of having killed several Hondurans and Salvadorans in Honduras from 1981 to 1984, apparently in an effort to end gun-running operations from Nicaragua to El Salvador, according to a Honduran official and Hondurans with close contacts in the Government.

Many of the killings are believed to have been connected with the activities of a secret, army-backed, Honduran paramilitary group known as the "Special Investigations" unit.

The unit reportedly used Nicaraguan rebels in its operations, according to two of the sources. Honduran soldiers are also reported to have carried out several killings, they said.

A senior Nicaraguan rebel official, Adolfo Calero, denied in a telephone interview that members of his organization had been involved in the killings. A spokesman for the United States Embassy said he had heard of charges against the rebels but that no evidence had been shown to the embassy.

Honduran Army Report

Information on the slayings, as well as on other suspected killings by supporters of Salvadoran guerrillas and of the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua, is believed to be contained in a report by Honduran Army investigators, according to a Honduran military offi-

cial. The army investigators spent seven months studying the deaths and disappearances of at least 247 Hondurans, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans and citizens of other countries here in recent years.

The report remains secret and it is not known what evidence it offers of political killings. Some of the study's findings have been selectively disclosed by Honduran military officials, and the disclosure has provoked speculation and controversy here.

In a press statement made public last month, the army said it was "not possible to pronounce with absolute certainty on the disappearances of persons" or to "identify those responsible." The statement said the army would continue its investigation for 90 more days.

According to one senior Honduran officer, the report offers evidence that Nicaraguan rebels killed 18 to 20 Hondurans. The Nicaraguans are also suspected in some of the disappearances or killings of more than 80 Salvadorans between 1981 and 1984, according to a Honduran familiar with the cases.

Aiding Salvadoran Rebels

A Honduran leftist with intimate knowledge of the activities of Salvadoran guerrilla groups here said most of the 247 people who were killed or who disappeared were involved in activities to aid Salvadoran rebels. A Honduran official said most of those killed were involved in gunrunning operations.

"They were destroyed," said a Honduran leftist, who said one of his relatives is among the missing. "This was the objective. Most of the disappeared were working with the Salvadorans."

The Reagan Administration authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to train and supply Nicaraguan rebels in 1981 with the stated purpose of "interdicting" suspected shipments of arms between Nicaragua and El Salvador. C.I.A. involvement with the rebels has been under intense Congressional scrutiny since the disclosure of a C.I.A. training manual that instructed the rebels to "neutralize" selected Nicaraguan officials.

Although some Honduran sources suggested the C.I.A. was aware of efforts here to eliminate support for Salvadoran guerrillas, there is no evidence to confirm direct C.I.A. involvement in the actual operations. A spokesman for the United States Embassy here refused to comment when asked about possible C.I.A. contact with those believed to have carried out political killings.

[George Lauder, a spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency in Washington, said, "The agency will not comment on alleged covert activities in Central America."]

Rebel Leader's Comment

Mr. Calero, the head of the main Nicaraguan rebel group, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, denied in a telephone interview today that members of his group had been involved in political killings here. He said the rebels were willing to cooperate with Honduran Government investigators to prove their innocence.

"There is no such thing," he said. "They are trying to smear us all over."

Reports of a suspected Nicaraguan rebel role in such killings may be prompted by political considerations. The Honduran Army command is known to be worried by the cutoff of United States aid to 12,000 Nicaraguan guerrillas whose camps are on the Honduran border.

Some politicians here say they believe that Honduran officers are disclosing information about the rebels both to deflect criticism of army involvement in political killings and to prepare the ground for an expulsion of the Nicaraguan rebels if the United States Congress does not approve aid for the insurgents this year.

Honduran human rights activists have repeatedly blamed the army for involvement in political killings here.

Dr. Ramón Custodio, head of the Honduran Human Rights Commission, said in an interview that the army was blaming the rebels to avoid admitting having a role in the killings. He said his group had no evidence of Nicaraguan rebel involvement in such activities.